

DEFENDING COMMON SENSE

Skeptizismus ist *nicht* unwiderleglich, sondern offenbar unsinnig, wenn er bezweifeln will, wo nicht gefragt werden kann.

Denn Zweifel kann nur bestehen, wo eine Frage besteht; eine Frage nur, wo eine Antwort besteht, und diese nur, wo etwas *gesagt* werden kann. — Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, *6.51

IN "A DEFENCE OF COMMON SENSE"¹ G. E. Moore wrote down a list of propositions which he called "truisms." The following are some of the propositions in that list: "There exists at present a living human body, which is *my* body"; "The earth had existed for many years before my body was born"; "Ever since it was born it has been either in contact with or not far from the surface of the earth"; "I am a human being"; "I have often perceived both my own body and other things which formed part of its environment, including other human bodies." Moore said that every one of the propositions in his list "I *know*, with certainty, to be true."²

In his "Proof of an External World"³ Moore gave what he considered to be "a perfectly rigorous proof" of the existence of "things outside of us."⁴ He said that he could prove that two human hands exist. "How? By holding up my two hands, and saying, as I make a certain gesture with the right hand, 'Here is one hand,' and adding, as I make a certain gesture with the left, 'and here is another.'"⁵ He said that this would not have been a proof unless (among other things) "the premiss which I adduced was something which I *knew* to be the case, and not merely something which I believed but which was by no means certain, or something which, though in fact true, I did not know to be so." But, he continued,

I certainly did at the moment *know* that which I expressed by the combination of certain gestures with saying the words, 'there is one hand and here is another.' I *knew* that there was one hand in the place indicated by combining a certain

¹ In J. H. Muirhead, ed., *Contemporary British Philosophy*, 2d ser.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 224.

³ In *Proceedings of the British Academy*, XXV, 1939.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

⁵ *Ibid.*